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ABSTRACT

Changes in the social demography of the United States call for increasing multicultural collaboration, consultation, and cooperation at educational and leadership levels. General and special educators must learn to collaborate, consult, and cooperate with each other if they are serious about addressing local, national, or global problems. The Comprehensive Support Model is proposed as a way to connect family, schools, and the community to foster educational excellence. Ten guiding principles for use by general and special educators attempting to collaborate, consult, and cooperate are presented, including, among others: an inclusive classroom is a classroom that values cooperative learning and teaching; all service providers have to relate to each other with the student as the dominant person; both caring and sharing are important; and the strategic positions of people must be respected and expectations of them must not alienate or label them as individuals with deficits. (Contains 21 references.) (DB)

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Collaboration, Consultation and Cooperation:

3 Cs for Multicultural General and Special Education

General educators (e.g., counselors, psychologists, administrators, and service providers), special educators, and community leaders are continually challenged to respond to individual and collective growth (Ford & Obiakor, 1995; Hamburg, 1990, 1991; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, Obiakor, 1994; Obiakor & Algozzine, 1995). Many years ago, the launching of Sputnik by the Russians crystallized this fact. In the United States, committees were set up, schools were challenged to provide maximum opportunities for students, and community leaders responded. Today, changes in the social demography pose a greater challenge to educators and communities. This challenge will be particularly apparent in the 21st century, and will call for multicultural collaboration, consultation, cooperation, understanding, and valuing at educational and leadership levels. Surely, for multicultural valuing to be infused, there must be powershifts and paradigm shifts in the traditional ways schools and communities collaborate, consult, and cooperate. In this paper, the authors address these phenomena and suggest guiding principles for general and special educators.

Conceptual Frameworks

Collaboration, consultation and cooperation are frequently used synonymously. According to Dettmer, Thurston and Dyck (1993), "collaborating is assisting or cooperating with" (p. 15). They explained that:

> One intriguing dictionary definition of collaborating is cooperating with the enemy. For educational purposes, the "enemy" might be viewed as the learning problem needing service, or the behavior requiring modification, or lack of tolerance toward a problem.

Communication, cooperation, and coordination are vital aspects of the collaborative process. (p. 15)

Consultation reinforces understanding collaboration and partnership. Dettmer et al (1993) defined consultation as "a council, conference, or formal deliberation" (p.13). For instance, "school consultation is activity in which professional educators and parents collaborate within the school context by communicating, cooperating, and coordinating their efforts as a team to serve the learning and behavioral needs of students" (Dettmer et al, 1993, p.14). A logical extension is that where there is consultation, there is mutual collaboration, cooperation, partnership, and team-work among community members and organizations.

Cooperation involves group building to achieve a common goal. It entails inclusive decision-making. Dettmer et al (1993) defined cooperation as "the act of uniting, banding, combining, concurring, or conjoining" (p. 14). In other words, it does not ignore the "person" or individual accountability. It does, however, magnify shared accountability and responsibility in decision-making situations. Johnson and Johnson (1993) noted that "diversity is celebrated within a cooperation context. And those who work and learn in a cooperative setting benefit from diversity, as it is the differences among members--differences in their talents, skills, perceptions, and thoughts--that make a cooperative group powerful" (p. xiii).

The 3 Cs and Multiculturalism

The 3 C's (Collaboration, Consultation, and Cooperation) have as their central theme "multiculturalism." As Pederson (1991) pointed out:

Multiculturalism is a pervasive force in modern society that acknowledges the complexity of culture. During the last 20 years, multiculturalism has become recognized

as a powerful force, not just for understanding "exotic" groups but also for understanding ourselves and those with whom we work in a complicated social context. Multiculturalism has gained the status of a general theory, complementing other scientific theories to explain human behavior. (p. 6)

Pederson's (1991) statement reiterates the fact that multiculturalism is not a simplistic construct. It involves collaboration, consultation, inclusion, partnership and appreciation of diverse skills and cultures. With multiculturalism, peoples' belief systems are re-oriented, and they are motivated to (a) care for all individuals, (b) have reasonable expectations of all individuals, (c) listen to all individuals, (d) have rewarding environments for all individuals, and (e) involve all individuals in problem-solving. Additionally, with multiculturalism, people are inspired to re-examine traditional methods of collaboration, consultation, and cooperation where only a particular group of people work with each other while ignoring the potential contributions of other groups.

In reality, collaboration, consultation, and cooperation are mutually inclusive and not mutually exclusive. Based on this perspective, "change" becomes an inclusive phenomenon that enhances school networking, parent partnership, community involvement, and even global understanding (Obiakor, Hawes, Weaver, & Schwenn, 1995). Put another way, when general and special educators leave their comfort zones, they begin to change their perceptions about people, events and situations, and thereby collaboratively combat school and societal problems. According to Gollnich and Chinn (1990), many school and societal problems stem from:

A combination of several factors: (1) a lack of understanding of the history, experiences, values and perceptions of ethnic groups other than one's own; (2) stereotyping the

> members of an ethnic group without consideration of individual differences within the group; (3) judging the other ethnic groups according to the standards and values of one's own group; (4) assigning negative attributes to members of other ethnic groups; and (5) evaluating the qualities and experiences of other groups as inferior to one's own. (p. 89)

Apparently, Gollnich and Chinn's (1990) statement is not limited to one ethnic group or one gender. General and special educators of all persuasions have to learn to collaborate, consult and cooperate with each other if they are serious about addressing local, national, or global problems confronting them. More than a decade ago, Toffler (1982) challenged the citizenry when he wrote:

> The responsibility for change, therefore, lies with us. We must begin with ourselves not to close our minds prematurely to the novel, the surprising, the seemingly radical. This means fighting off idea assassins who rush forward to kill any new suggestion on grounds of its impracticality, while defending whatever now exists as practical, no matter how absurd, oppressive, or unworkable it may be. It means fighting for freedom of expression, the right to voice their ideas even if heretical. (p. 443)

The 3 Cs: Impact on Schools and Communities

No school, business, or community will succeed without collaboration, consultation and cooperation. The connected well-being of peoples must be given serious consideration if their sacred existence must flourish. Obiakor (1994), Samuelson and Obiakor (1995), and Toffler (1991) agreed that now is the time to prepare for shifts in power and paradigm. For instance, Samuelson and Obiakor noted that "the best way to anticipate the future is to start very early to search for `new' meaning" (p. 1). They added:

To prepare ourselves for the coming shifts in the teaching paradigm, we can base our actions on some of the major pillars of quality teaching:

1. When in doubt, learn the facts.
2. Learn and teach with divergent techniques.
3. Embrace learning and continue to learn.
4. Engage in continuous discourse or dialogue with others and with self. (p. 1)

The ideas espoused by Samuelson and Obiakor (1995) will not materialize without collaboration, consultation and cooperation. Other educators and scholars (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995; Dettmer et al, 1993; Ford & Obiakor, 1995; Ford, Obiakor & Patton, 1995; Lyman & Foyle, 1993; Lyman, Foyle & Azwell, 1993; Putnam, 1993; & Stainback & Stainback, 1990) have advocated similar strategies for connecting classroom instructions with community partnership.

Schools and communities must work together to help students to maximize their potential. It is self-destructive to categorize students, parents, schools, and communities. The home has a role to play, the school has a role to play, and the society has a role to play. Based on this premise, we propose a Comprehensive Support Model (CSM) (Obiakor, 1994) to connect all parties involved. According to the CSM, educational excellence and success must connect families, schools, and communities. The operational formula is, ES = F + S + O; i.e., Educational Success = Family + Schools + Opportunities. By family, we mean individual efforts and parents; by schools, we mean general and special educators, counselors and service providers; and by opportunities, we mean jobs, businesses and communities. All persons must begin to appreciate and value diversity or multiculturalism. As Mendenhall (1991) pointed out,

"in many parts of the United States it is a reality--and it is predicted that by the year 2010 it will be a reality for the entire American work place" (p. D7). He explained that "the more everyone knows and understands the same set of social values, the less interpersonal problems will result between group members" (p. D7). As a consequence, all members of the community must join in this pursuit for diversity. The reason is simple. Diversity encourages partnership, collaboration, consultation, cooperation, and excellence. Opportunities for growth must be encouraged for all individuals in the community. Logically, collaborative communities produce collaborative teachers and schools, and vice versa.

Guiding Principles for General and Special Educators

For general and special educators to collaborate, consult, and cooperate with each other, they must respond to the following guiding principles (Obiakor, 1994):

1. An inclusive classroom is a classroom that values cooperative learning and teaching.
2. All service providers have to relate to each other with the student as the dominant person.
3. It is not enough to say we care--we must also share.
4. We have to respect the strategic positions of people--our expectations of them have to be those that will not alienate or label them as individuals with deficits.
5. It is almost self-destructive to intimidate each other--general and special educators provide valuable resources.
6. Teachers facilitate instruction when there are good collaboration, consultation, and cooperation amongst educators, parents, and other professionals involved

with the student.

7. "A tree can never make a forest"--you win alone, you lose alone!

8. We stop learning when we are dead--some religions even believe there is life after death.

9. The education of a child is not just a school's job or a parent's job--it is everyone's job.

10. We have come a long way--so, why stop? Let us continue to communicate!

Perspective

Collaboration, consultation, cooperation (3 Cs) are major ingredients of successful schools and communities. They enhance our knowledge of history, symbols, behavioral patterns, cultural values and events that have molded different individuals. Our society will only succeed when individuals believe they can share in the responsibility. As we advance into the 21st century, "shared responsibility" will be the guiding construct to help individuals (including educators and leaders) to maximize their potential. General and special educators cannot continue to blame others for their failures. They must dialogue to facilitate collaboration, consultation, cooperation, and excellence for "it really takes a whole village to raise a child."

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